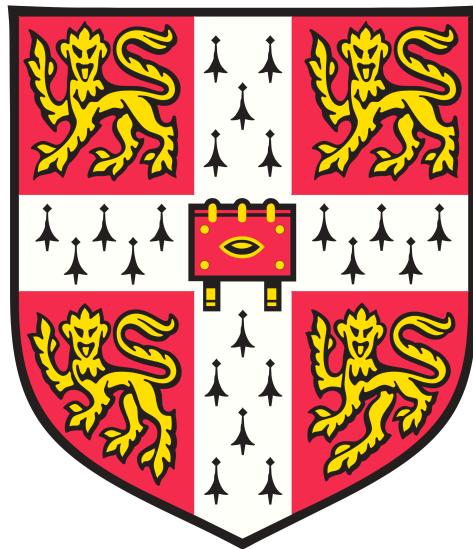


# **The *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* and Eighth-Century Constantinopolitan Perceptions of Antiquity**

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## Introduction

The *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (henceforth *PSC*) is one of very few extant literary sources from the ‘dark age’ of Byzantium and, as such, is an invaluable witness to the dynamics of this period.<sup>1</sup> *PSC* is primarily concerned with explaining the significance of Constantinople’s statuary, much of which its authors could still observe *in situ*.<sup>2</sup> The phrase *παραστασεις συντομοι χρονικαι* (‘brief historical notes’) may or may not be the intended title, but nonetheless conveys a basic understanding of the disjunctive, fragmentary text as it exists today. Much of *PSC* is preserved in the *Patria*, a tenth-century dossier of similar type, and the so-called *Anonymous Treu*.<sup>3</sup> Although *PSC* is clearly ‘le plus ancien et le plus authentique produit’ of this group, its precise dating is rather difficult to pinpoint.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is best to follow Speck, who believes it is most logical to use broad parameters when dating *PSC* and be content with knowing that its production transpired throughout the eighth century.<sup>5</sup> Individual sections of *PSC* can be assigned more accurate dates based upon their specific content, but the *terminus post quem* for the whole is most likely set by the mention of Philippicus (711–713) in Ch.37.<sup>6</sup>

In recent decades, variegated opinions have been held regarding this unique text. Mango believed it functions on ‘a very low intellectual level’, while others averred it is full of ‘staggering absurdities and confusions’, making many historians hesitant to use it as a serious historical source.<sup>7</sup> However, thanks mostly to the efforts of Cameron and Herrin, the value of *PSC* for historical study has been largely revitalised.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Dagron and Berger have

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<sup>1</sup> All translations and excerpts taken from A. Cameron and J. Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Leiden, 1984); for ‘dark age’ see M. Whitby, ‘Greek Historical Writing After Procopius’, in A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (eds), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), 28. Also see the Introduction and piece by A. Cameron in the same volume.

<sup>2</sup> For an invaluable catalogue of antiquities in Constantinople see S. Bassett, *Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge, 2004), 143–249.

<sup>3</sup> For the most recent and accessible edition of the *Patria* see A. Berger (trans.), *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013) vol. XXIV; for an excellent discussion of the relationship among these texts see Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 3–8.

<sup>4</sup> G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: études sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris, 1984), 31.

<sup>5</sup> P. Speck, ‘War Bronze Ein Knappes Metall? Die Legende von Dem Stier Auf Dem Bus in Den ‘Parastaseis’ 42’, *Hellenika*, 39 (1988), 6.

<sup>6</sup> For a clear a clear explanation of the dating see B. Anderson, ‘Classified Knowledge: The Epistemology of Statuary in the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 35 (2011), 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> C. Mango, ‘Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17 (1963) 60; A. Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (Oxford, 1973), 110.

<sup>8</sup> Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*.

produced important work that valorises the historical content of the *Patria*.<sup>9</sup> Such a shift is cognate to a greater movement within Byzantine studies, which has realised that linguistic register cannot always be trusted as a sign of intellectual prowess. A perfect example is Malalas, who adopted a banausic style even though his training enabled him to write as well as Procopius. Unlike Malalas, the authors of *PSC* seem to be aiming for a linguistic register that is genuinely beyond their reach. Many ‘pretensions to literary style’ are revealed in the loose construction of sentences, their penchant for genitive absolutes, and perhaps even their frequent use of *ιστόρησεν* as employed by Herodotus.<sup>10</sup> Such features are hardly surprising since we know their main literary models were ecclesiastical.<sup>11</sup>

Questions regarding the purpose of *PSC* naturally arise due to its unique characteristics. Perhaps too often *PSC* has been mined as a source for information relating to art history. While such information is certainly available in *PSC*, the reader is quickly struck by how unconcerned the authors of *PSC* are with specific artistic features. Furthermore, they are only tangentially concerned with the iconoclasm of the period. Mango believed *PSC* was some sort of ‘guidebook’ while Cameron and Herrin disagreed and proposed that it was the product of a ‘local historical society’.<sup>12</sup> Kazhdan is confident that Cameron and Herrin are incorrect and insists that *PSC* is a comedic and ‘playful’ parody.<sup>13</sup> Most recently, Anderson has offered a fascinating interpretation of *PSC* as a symbol of ‘classified knowledge’ among a privileged Constantinopolitan class, a thesis which is intrinsically related to the influx of foreigners to Constantinople in the eighth century.<sup>14</sup> Anderson’s interpretation is as plausible as any, but is encumbered by the fact that much of the ‘secret knowledge’ that was said to be orally transmitted can be found in both the chronicles of Marcellinus and Malalas.<sup>15</sup> Whether the knowledge of *PSC* was confined to an elite coterie or more broadly available to the public, it testifies to the fact that eighth-century Constantinopolitans felt comfortable using antique statuary to explain their own history – not

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<sup>9</sup> Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*; A. Berger, *Untersuchungen Zu Den Patria Konstantinopoleos* (Bonn, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 60; Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kazhdan, “Constantin Imaginaire”: Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century About Constantine the Great’, *Byzantium*, 57 (1987), 250.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, ‘Classified Knowledge’; for the influx of foreigners see J. Haldon, ‘The Fate of the Late Roman Senatorial Elite: Extinction or Transformation’, in J. Haldon and L. I. Conrad (eds), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East VI: Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Princeton, 2004), 210–229.

<sup>15</sup> Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 3.

because the statues were entirely different from their culture, but precisely for the way they had become so fused with Byzantine identity. Although Chuvin faults the authors of *PSC* for forgetting so much of the Classical tradition, James rightly asserts that ‘the classical tradition had become emended and altered as Byzantine society itself changed’.<sup>16</sup> Rather than faulting Byzantines’ credulity regarding Antiquity from the plumb line of our own knowledge, it is far more helpful to approach their views as legitimate for their own time.<sup>17</sup>

The question of how exactly the Byzantines perceived and related to the antique past is a matter of contention and is complicated by several factors. The first involves the degree to which Byzantines saw themselves as both distinct from and in solidarity with the Greek and Roman past.<sup>18</sup> Scholarly divergence on this issue is reflected by the inconsistent usage of terms such as ‘pagan’, ‘Hellenic’, ‘Classical’, ‘Antique’, and ‘Greek’. *PSC* employs forms of “Ελλήν” eleven times, mostly to denote unfavourable distinction, while terms such as Ἀρειανοί and Περσικῶν are used almost as frequently to similar effect.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, historical evidence portrays an interpenetration of Byzantine and antique ideals so thorough that any bifurcation inevitably produces an artificial construction of Byzantine identity.

Next, the question of intentionalism has been raised in an effort to expose a modern proclivity for imposing anachronistic understandings upon Byzantine material culture. James describes intentionalism as ‘a fallacy drawn from art history’s dependence on the artist and an ingrained, though unspoken, belief in artistic genius’.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we should not assume that Byzantine emperors recognised any single, innate meaning of the statuary they displayed, nor that the populous would have necessarily grasped any singular meaning they may have intended.

Finally, determining Byzantine perceptions of Antiquity at any specific point in history is complicated by the fact that such perceptions evolved in tandem with the broader identity of the empire. For instance, the sense of Christian triumph over paganism so clearly espoused by

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<sup>16</sup> L. James, “‘Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard’: Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople”, *Gesta*, 35 (1996), 14; P. Chuvin, *Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, 1990), 4.

<sup>17</sup> For an important discussion on this point see R. Grigg, ‘Byzantine Credulity as an Impediment to Antiquarianism’, *Gesta*, 26 (1987), 3–9.

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent book-length treatment of this topic see A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Ch.55 links paganism to the discipline of philosophy, which is highly esteemed throughout *PSC*. In ch.39 Arius is described as ‘the wretch who dared to blaspheme worse than the pagans.’

<sup>20</sup> James, ‘Pray Not to Fall into Temptation’, 13.

Malalas was not primary on the agenda of Constantine,<sup>21</sup> and later writers such as Codinos and Choniates represent a level of ‘superstition’ towards statuary largely absent in the earlier empire.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, there is strong evidence that perceptions of Antiquity did not evolve in a linear, uniform fashion, but that at any given time in Byzantium, multiple perceptions of Antiquity were simultaneously held by the population.<sup>23</sup> Arguably, this phenomenon was accentuated from 400–1040, which has been characterised as a period of ‘limbo’ with regard to the antique past.<sup>24</sup>

Study of *PSC* allows us to focus on perceptions of Antiquity within a particular Constantinopolitan group. *PSC* clearly reflects a period of decline deeply affected by the characteristic urban dislocation of the seventh and eighth centuries, and not yet affected by the revitalised appreciation of Antiquity during the so-called Macedonian Renaissance of the tenth century. It is well known that the Seventh-Century Crisis led to a decline of the arts, but statuary was especially affected due to its mostly public display and consequent exposure to weather and destructive mobs.<sup>25</sup> The growing disappearance and destruction of statuary seems to motivate the authors of *PSC* in their effort to preserve both the events and meaning of the past – a desire perhaps matched by others in their time.<sup>26</sup>

This essay argues that multiple views of ancient statuary existed in eighth-century Constantinople and reflected differing levels of knowledge regarding layers of meaning that had been accumulated. Some citizens – particularly the authors of *PSC* – were conscious of more ‘layers’ of meaning than others. However, even the most knowledgeable of Byzantine citizens in the eighth century would not have agreed with their fourth-century counterparts. Although *PSC* recognises a distinction between its own context and that of Antiquity, it exhibits an unconscious absorption of antique material culture so complete that the authors possessed a license to expound on the significance of that culture as if it were their own.

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<sup>21</sup> Malalas, *Chronographia*, I. Thurn (ed.), *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* (Berlin, 2000) vol. XXXV, 18.82–94; cf. P. Odorico, ‘La chronique de Malalas entre littérature et philosophie’, in R. Macrides (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium* (Farnham, 2010), 285–87.

<sup>22</sup> For ‘superstition’ see Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 68.

<sup>23</sup> I. Ševčenko, ‘The Search for the Past in Byzantium around the Year 800’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 46 (1992), 279–93.

<sup>24</sup> Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 173–187.

<sup>25</sup> For a counterbalance to the decline of the arts in the seventh century see M. Mango, ‘Imperial Art in the Seventh Century’, in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 109–38.

<sup>26</sup> See Ševčenko, ‘The Search for the Past’.

In the following pages, *PSC* will be considered for how it represents eighth century Constantinople in the overall context of these layers of perception. Specifically, this essay seeks to accomplish three things: to summarise perceptions of Antiquity present in eighth-century Constantinople via the consideration of statuary; to explain these eighth century perceptions with regard to the changing views of statuary throughout Byzantium's history; and to offer some consequential explanations for understudied antiquities of the Basilica Cistern.

## Constantine and Statuary in Antiquity

In order to appreciate the collection of statuary in eighth-century Constantinople, it is vital to consider the prevailing significance of statues in Antiquity. For the Greeks, Persians, and Romans, statuary had long served to flaunt the wealth, power, and prestige of a city.<sup>27</sup> The erection of statues and monuments was an expensive venture. It not only involved the cost of the raw materials (marble and especially bronze), but also the labour of the craftsmen. Sundry statues and monuments were obtained as spoils of war<sup>28</sup> and thereby communicated the victory and triumph over the original owners of the monument. Moreover, statuary often served to form a connection to important figures of the past, including emperors, warriors, gods, and other mythical characters. Rome, for instance, was deeply concerned to claim association with the mythic Trojan characters from the *Aeneid*.

The precise symbolic import of statuary in Antiquity is an issue of some dispute.<sup>29</sup> Although it is clear that statuary was deeply symbolic, it is unclear how obvious such symbolism was to the average observer. Regarding 'Late Antique' Constantinople, Bassett has argued that such symbolism was mostly accessible to average citizens.<sup>30</sup> Despite the attractiveness of Bassett's argument, Dagron opines, 'Sarah Bassett entend aller plus loin, trop loin peut-être, en découvrant les intentions qui ont présidé au choix des statues et à leur regroupement par thèmes dans tel ou tel décor monumental'.<sup>31</sup> Dagron's scepticism regarding 'themes' is especially crucial. For instance, Bassett insists that the statuary of the Hippodrome chiefly conveyed 'military

<sup>27</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 13; for distinctions between rural and urban statuary see Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response* (Oxford, 2003), 157–183.

<sup>28</sup> Not to be confused with *spolia*.

<sup>29</sup> See Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 19–45.

<sup>30</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*.

<sup>31</sup> G. Dagron, 'Review of The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 13 (2006), 143.

prowess and political power' while the Baths of Zeuxippos displayed 'intellectual hegemony'.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps more likely, citizens simply sensed the grandeur of Constantinople through the sheer number and splendour of diverse statuary. Some claim the common Roman practice of 'recarving and reidentifying their statues' further weakens the precision of Bassett's project.<sup>33</sup> However, there is evidence that citizens could often track such changes. For instance, Ch.47 of *PSC* reports that Julian repurposed idols (ειδώλα) 'into the semblance of imperial statues', thereby leading the naive citizens into idolatry. The function and use of statuary in both Antiquity and Byzantium was considerably complex.

When Constantine founded his new capital city in 324, he conducted one of the most extensive projects of decoration known in history. He sent expeditions far and wide to collect impressive statuary, which led Jerome to remark: 'Dedicatur Constantinopolis omnium paene urbium nuditate'.<sup>34</sup> Mere quantity, however, would not meet the mark *de rigueur* for which Constantine aimed. He intended to graft his νικόπολις into the mythic narrative of Rome's foundation – ergo the characters from the Trojan myth in the Baths of Zeuxippos.<sup>35</sup> In fact, many statues were taken from Rome itself to accomplish the 'absorption' of that illustrious city into the new Constantinople.<sup>36</sup> The distinction between paganism and Christianity has been exaggerated in past historiography and it is critical to maintain that Constantine's entire project took place 'outside the realm of religion'.<sup>37</sup> This reality is supported by the balanced number of pagan temples and Christian churches and solves the old puzzle of why 'pagan' statuary was so prevalent in a new Christian age.<sup>38</sup>

Though far less substantial, the Theodosian Dynasty also conducted a sort of 'decoration project' designed to communicate their political agenda.<sup>39</sup> If Constantine was concerned with crafting a new urban identity, the Theodosians were focused on 'dynastic aggrandizement'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 71.

<sup>33</sup> E. Marlowe, 'Review of The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 126 (2006), 204.

<sup>34</sup> 'Constantinople is dedicated with the nudity of nearly all cities.' Jerome, *Chronicon*, I. Fotheringham (ed.), (London, 1923), 314.

<sup>35</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> S. Bassett, 'The Antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991), 93.

<sup>37</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> For the equal number and status of religious institutions in Constantinople see *Ibid.*, 35–36; 123.

<sup>39</sup> Polemius Silvius, *Notitia dignitatum; accedunt Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae et laterculi prouinciarum*, O. Seeck (ed.), (Berlin, 1876), 229–43.

<sup>40</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 81–82.

This they accomplished in large part by erecting monuments in areas associated with previous emperors—namely the Hippodrome and Augsteion.<sup>41</sup> Despite the *Cunctos Populos* and absence of new pagan structures, we know that credence was still given to antique forms, even if less explicit than under Constantine. The Theodosius Missorium<sup>42</sup> and the additions of Herakles and the Skylla group to the Hippodrome are obvious examples, while the columns of the Theodosian Arch mimic almost exactly the paradigmatic club of Herakles in Hellenistic statues.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the established fame of Heraklian statuary and typology was not only preserved in Byzantium, but gradually coalesced with stories of David (who also fought lions and bears), Alexander (the premier model of a *strategos* and *basileus*), and eventually Heraclius.<sup>44</sup> Stewart keenly notes how well suited statuary was for emperors who sought ‘to preserve the form of Roman culture and society while adapting its content to the new religion’, and the prominence of Herakles in the *PSC* demonstrates the effectiveness of this tactic.<sup>45</sup>

The collection of statuary in Constantinople has attracted incessant attention since its formation. Dawkins established a precedent for modern consideration of the collection and claimed that the overall perception was one of deep reverence and awe.<sup>46</sup> Mango subsequently traced the gradual shift of understanding statuary as demonic dwellings to objects more similar to talismans and palladia.<sup>47</sup> Although his article was critical for the advancement of Byzantine Studies, Mango focused more generally on Byzantium as a whole and consequently pulled examples from places as far afield as Gaza, Memphis, and Antioch.<sup>48</sup>

Notably, talismanic and palladic understandings of statuary were absent during the foundation of Constantinople. *PSC* Ch.1 casually mentions the building of St. Mocius with the stones from a temple of Zeus under Constantine, an action that would soon become far more problematic for Christians. Nonetheless, it is clear that suspicion of ancient statuary began to

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 79–97.

<sup>42</sup> See B. Kiilerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism in the Plastic Arts: Studies in the so-Called Theodosian Renaissance* (Odense, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, the Hercules of the Theatre of Pompey (Vatican Museums, Rome).

<sup>44</sup> For the fame of Heraklian statuary see J. J. Pollitt, *Art and Experience in Classical Greece* (Cambridge, Eng., 1972), 189; for Alexander as *strategos* and *basileus* see I. Shahîd, ‘Heraclius: Πιστος Εν Χριστω Βασιλευς’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 34 (1980), 230; for the relationship between Herakles and Heraclius see Mango, ‘Imperial Art’; R. E. Leader, ‘The David Plates Revisited: Transforming the Secular in Early Byzantium’, *The Art Bulletin*, 82 (2000), 407–27.

<sup>45</sup> Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 155.

<sup>46</sup> R. M. Dawkins, ‘Ancient Statues in Mediaeval Constantinople’, *Folklore*, 35 (1924), 209–48.

<sup>47</sup> Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 56.

grow with the dissemination of Christianity. James and Saradi act as a counterbalance to the assertions of Mango by relegating the influence of statuary in Early Byzantium to a more neutral position; they deny that ‘power’ in statuary was understood to be malicious.<sup>49</sup> James and Saradi both discuss the practice of laying *spolia* down on their sides, but with slightly different conclusions. Both believe this represents a ‘harnessing’ of power, but Saradi also emphasises the goal of negating power through the victory of Christianity over paganism.<sup>50</sup> Frequently, the sign of the cross was carved on antique statuary.<sup>51</sup> In essence, this practice ‘Christianised’ the statues, but it is difficult to ascertain whether this was intended to destroy or appropriate the latent power of the objects.<sup>52</sup> Saradi is also concerned with the practicality of using *spolia* as building blocks for new structures and contends that it was not always as convenient as has been previously thought.<sup>53</sup> Conceding the fine line between merely decorative *spolia* and actual statues, Foss has shown that statues themselves (not just carved blocks of marble) were specifically used in the construction of the wall at Antioch.<sup>54</sup> The durability of statuary had a serious influence upon Byzantine perceptions of Antiquity and precipitated markedly complex and often ambiguous ideas regarding antique objects.

The example of the famous Plataean Tripod from Delphi—the stump of which still stands in Istanbul—will give an idea of the incredible longevity possible for some statuary.<sup>55</sup> Commonly known as the Serpent Column, it is first mentioned by Herodotus: ‘ο τρίποντος χρύσεος ἀνετέθη ὁ ἐπὶ τοῦ τρικαρήνου ὄφιος τοῦ χαλκέου ἐπεστεὼς’.<sup>56</sup> The tripod that sat upon the three-headed bronze snake was missing by the time it was acquired by Constantine and the base presumably continued to function as a simple symbol of victory. Eusebius makes general mention of the ‘delphic tripods’ and claims Constantine set them up in the Hippodrome for the

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<sup>49</sup> James, ‘Pray Not to Fall into Temptation’; H. Saradi, ‘The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 3 (1997), 395–423.

<sup>50</sup> James, ‘Pray Not to Fall into Temptation’, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Saradi, ‘Ancient Spolia’, 403; cf. C. Foss, ‘Late Antique and Byzantine Ankara’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 31 (1977).

<sup>52</sup> Saradi, ‘Ancient Spolia’, 404.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>54</sup> Foss, ‘Byzantine Ankara’.

<sup>55</sup> For greater insight consult R. Strootman, ‘The Serpent Column: The Persistent Meanings of a Pagan Relic in Christian and Islamic Constantinople’, *Material Religion*, 10 (2014), 432–51; also the forthcoming book by P. Stephenson, *The Serpent Column: A Cultural Biography* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, A. D. Godley (trans.), (Cambridge, 1920), IX.81.

‘ridicule’ of spectators, but does not mention the Plataen Tripod or its history.<sup>57</sup> Bassett surmises that the 800-year-old tripod was easily recognised to symbolise the ‘triumph of civilization over barbarism’ at the time of Constantine, a claim much in need of literary evidence.<sup>58</sup> *PSC* contains only two vague mentions of ‘tripods’, neither of which are located in the Hippodrome.<sup>59</sup> A more obscure reference, however, may support Basset’s hypothesis. In Ch.61 *PSC* quickly mentions τῶν Μήδων τοῦ ἐλεγείου.<sup>60</sup> Although the letters at the base of the Serpent Column are hardly an epigram, it would make sense for *PSC* to describe them as such. If this is, in fact, a reference to the Plataean Tripod, it may suggest that *PSC* takes its notoriety for granted and therefore considers a description unnecessary. Regardless, at some point in Late Byzantium the Serpent Column’s main significance was eventually solidified as a talisman against snakes.<sup>61</sup>

## The Justinianic Era

The salient feature regarding statuary in the Justinianic period is a heightened emphasis on Christianity, which harkens back to the conversion of Constantine. This shift is instrumental to the views of *PSC*, whose authors clearly possess a Christian bias. Predictably, the popularity of the Christian chronicle played a major role during this period. It caused the stories of Rome’s foundation to fade from Byzantine consciousness as the Patriarchs of the Bible ‘took their place at center stage’.<sup>62</sup> Malalas reflects this phenomenon in his chronicle and links the destruction of statues to the defeat of paganism.<sup>63</sup> Of course, Malalas was not alone in this. He was acting ‘as a reflector of the newly emerging Byzantine view of the past’, which was also held by Justinian and much of Byzantium.<sup>64</sup>

Accordingly, Justinian mostly abandoned the previous imperial dependence upon statuary and engaged in large-scale construction of religious institutions. Unlike Constantine, who maintained a strategic balance between Christian and pagan structures, Justinian had no

<sup>57</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, A. Cameron and S. G. Hall (trans), Clarendon Ancient History Series (Oxford, 1999), III.54.

<sup>58</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 65.

<sup>59</sup> Ch.20, 69.

<sup>60</sup> ‘the epigram of the Medes’; cf. [www.paulstephenson.info/research/serpentcolumn.html](http://www.paulstephenson.info/research/serpentcolumn.html), last accessed on 13/2/16.

<sup>61</sup> Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 68; Strootman, ‘The Serpent Column’, 437.

<sup>62</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Malalas, *Chronographia*, 18.82–94; cf. Odorico, ‘La chronique de Malalas’, 285–87.

<sup>64</sup> Malalas, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, E. Jeffreys et al. (eds), *Byzantina Australiensia* (Melbourne, 1986), vol. IV, xxii.

reservations about his Christian aims. Rather than casting himself as an Apollo-Helios figure like Constantine,<sup>65</sup> after completing Hagia Sophia Justinian reportedly exclaimed, ‘Solomon, I have outdone thee.’<sup>66</sup>

What statuary Justinian did deposit was paltry in comparison to his predecessors and mostly involved mere relocation of pre-existing statues. *PSC* claims that 427 statues were removed from the Augsteion by Justinian and ‘distributed about the city’, which likely explains the statues deposited at the Arkadian Baths.<sup>67</sup> In fact, Justinian was mostly uninterested in the symbolic significance of antiquities.<sup>68</sup> Malalas reports the extreme instance of Justinian burning pagan statues in 562, but his disregard for statuary was clear throughout his reign.<sup>69</sup> The dislocation of the Augsteion collection is an important example because it shows Justinian’s disregard for the nuanced and interrelated significance it had acquired over the past 200 years. Consequently, much of Constantinople’s statuary after Justinian appeared strangely out of context. *PSC* seems to be aware that such randomness stemmed from Justinian’s acts of dispersal.

Although very little detail is known about Justinian’s specific deployment of statuary, a recently accessible site provides important evidence when considered in conjunction with *PSC*. The Basilica Cistern, built after the infamous riots of 532, has survived in excellent condition and contains a great deal of *spolia*.<sup>70</sup> Three of these are notable antiquities that have been largely neglected in academic literature: two gorgon heads and one richly carved column.<sup>71</sup> The column is clearly from the Arch of Theodosius, which was probably destroyed by the earthquake of 478.<sup>72</sup> The rest of the 336 columns in the cistern feature an array of styles, including the Corinthian, Ionic, and Doric, which confirms that they too were salvaged from older buildings and monuments.

The gorgon heads have yet to be properly studied, but similar objects are described in *PSC*’s two descriptions of the Chalke Gate.<sup>73</sup> The Chalke Gate was remodelled while the

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<sup>65</sup> Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 216–17; Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 57.

<sup>66</sup> T. Preger, (ed.), *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, vol. I (Leipzig, 1901), 105, § 27.

<sup>67</sup> Ch.11; for the Arkadian Baths see Bassett, *Urban Image*, 128.

<sup>68</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 125.

<sup>69</sup> Malalas, *Chronographia*, 18.136.

<sup>70</sup> The Basilica Cistern is known in Turkish as the Yerebatan Sarayı. For the construction of the Basilica Cistern see Procopius, *Buildings*, H. B. Dewing (trans.), (London, 1961), I.x.5–xi.19.

<sup>71</sup> Admittedly, some would not consider this column to be an antiquity since it was produced in late fourth century Byzantium. See Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 55.

<sup>72</sup> Other columns from the arch can be found broken in Beyazıt Square, Istanbul.

<sup>73</sup> Ch.44a, 78.

Basilica Cistern was being constructed, and it is the only documented location where Justinian erected *new* statuary. The passage of interest reads as follows:

Καὶ τοῦτο δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς Παπίας ἐδίδαξεν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ συγγραμμάτων, ὅτι αἱ γοργονοειδεῖς κεφαλαὶ ἐν τῇ Χαλκῇ πύλῃ, πρὸς μὲν τὸ πρόσθεν περιπατοῦντι εὐωνύμως, πρὸς δὲ τὸ ὄπισθεν δεξιῶς, τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος θεᾶς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ Εφεσίων ἤκασιν <όκτω>· τὰ μὲν τέσσαρα ἐν τοῖς Ταύρου μέρεσιν, ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς παλατίοις προσπηγθέντα Κωνσταντίνου...τὰ δὲ τέσσαρα ἐν τῇ προειρημένῃ πύλῃ εὐωνύμῳ μέρει.<sup>74</sup>

This passage, apparently dependent upon the words of Papias, seems to report that four gorgon heads were at the Chalke Gate while four more were in the Forum Tauri. Consequently, the word ὀκτώ is added from the Anonymous Treu in order to make sense of the ambiguous language.<sup>75</sup> The later *Patria*, however, describes only two gorgon heads at the Chalke Gate and more clearly explains that a group of eight statues was brought from the temple of Artemis in Ephesos by Justinian.<sup>76</sup> The Ephesian provenance is corroborated by the *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum* and is integral to making sense of the collection.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, the four Ephesian statues at the Chalke Gate probably consisted of two gorgon heads and two horses – which were also part of Justinian’s acquisition. The contradiction in number may be the result of an error in transmission, but can be better explained by the extant artefacts.<sup>78</sup>

The gorgon heads in the Basilica Cistern are matched by two nearly identical twins at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, but with one vital difference – those in the museum are conjoined while those in the cistern have been cut apart. Perhaps both pairs were remembered as part of the Ephesian acquisition, which could explain the number ‘four’ in the above passage. While *PSC* apparently makes no effort to correct the number of gorgon heads at the Chalke Gate, the *Patria* does. Therefore, it seems that although both pairs of gorgon heads originate from the temple of Artemis, those now at the museum were selected as decoration for one of the most prominent locations in the city while those in the cistern were repurposed for an utterly base function. Such an occurrence requires careful explanation.

<sup>74</sup> Ch.44a. ‘As this Papias also explained in his writings that the gorgon-like heads on the Chalke gate—which are on the left as the spectator approaches and on the right if he is walking away from it—came from the Ephesian temple of the goddess Artemis. There were <eight>. Four of these are in the area of the Forum Tauri, fixed on the ancient palace of Constantine... The other four are on the left of the above mentioned gate.’; Mango prefers the translation ‘gilded masks of Gorgons’, see C. Mango, *Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (København, 1959), 100.

<sup>75</sup> Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 234.

<sup>76</sup> *Patria* II, 28.

<sup>77</sup> T. Preger, (ed.), *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, vol. II (Leipzig, 1907), 165, § 28.

<sup>78</sup> See Bassett, *Urban Image*, 186.

As the primary entrance to the palace, the Chalke Gate was highly visible and it would have been ‘unthinkable’ to leave it undecorated.<sup>79</sup> The traditional aesthetic requirement coupled with Justinian’s disregard for statuary probably explains the strange collection of statuary assembled at the Chalke Gate. The two gorgon heads apparently fulfilled the traditional role of apotropaic defence of the palace, but it seems that Justinian gave little credence to their actual potency. Consequently, he merely placed the gorgon heads at the Chalke Gate ‘in a nod to time-honored traditions of visual culture’ and had no qualms about allowing the other pair to be cut apart for use as simple building blocks in the cistern.<sup>80</sup>

While Justinian’s perception of antique statuary is clear, the case of other Byzantines appears quite different. Despite Procopius’ flattery, the prodigious construction of Justinian was probably overseen by *curatores* and actually conducted by simple craftsmen and builders.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, details about the gorgon heads may reveal some views held by such workers. The first detail is the *position* of the gorgon heads in the Basilica Cistern. Neither of them is positioned upright – one being on its side and the other upside-down (Fig.1). While we should not discount the possibility that the gorgon heads were so positioned for ease of construction, such a theory cannot explain the upside-down head, which would have occupied the same dimensions whether placed upside-down or right side up.<sup>82</sup> Such positioning seems to indicate that some workers involved thought it necessary to negate the power of the gorgon heads. Aesthetic appeal could not have been a motivation, for the heads were completely hidden from the public eye. In fact, the sixteenth-century explorer of Constantinople, Gilles, records that during his visit he witnessed ‘the Pillars, up to the Middle of the Capitals... cover’d with Water’.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, it is no wonder that Procopius fails to mention any gorgon heads in the cistern. The positioning of the gorgon heads in the cistern strongly suggests that while Justinian and his administrators had little respect for antique statuary, others in Constantinople may have viewed such objects with far more suspicion.

A second detail supports this theory. Ch.78 of *PSC* takes special care to note the sign of the cross above the gorgon heads at the Chalke Gate: ‘ἐνθα καὶ σταυροῦ σημεῖον ἄνωθεν αὐτῶν

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>81</sup> Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 56.

<sup>82</sup> For ease of construction see Saradi, ‘Ancient Spolia’, 399.

<sup>83</sup> P. Gilles, *Antiquities of Constantinople* (London, 1729), 148.

‘σταται’.<sup>84</sup> This is the only mention of a cross in *PSC* that is not linked specifically to Constantine, and is made all the more important considering the centrality of Constantine and his vision of the cross in *PSC*.<sup>85</sup> The careful description of the cross ‘standing above’ the gorgon heads suggests that some thought it necessary to ‘Christianise’ them, even if Justinian viewed them as mere symbolic decoration.

Mango believed that antique statuary in Byzantium underwent a slow, consistent ‘change of personality... From being actively maleficent, they became vaguely sinister; the best thing to do was to leave them alone’.<sup>86</sup> Even if this were true for Byzantium at large it cannot be said of Constantinople, where the legacy of statuary was essentially innocuous. Although Eusebios clearly despised antique statuary, he did not consider it to be maleficent.<sup>87</sup> Such a suspicious view seems to have first developed in more rural parts of the empire, such as Gaza,<sup>88</sup> and even then was regularly accompanied by more pragmatic views.<sup>89</sup>

The evidence could suggest, therefore, that the predominant view of statuary in Constantinople under Justinian was probably pragmatic, but that the more maleficent view from the rural areas had by then also found its way to the capital. The increasing cultic role of icons and relics undoubtedly contributed to such emergent perceptions of statuary, and may help to explain why some Constantinopolitans, such as the builders of the Basilica Cistern, could be so fearful of antique statuary.<sup>90</sup> From Justinian to the composition of *PSC*, Mango’s narrative is more plausible. Still, actions of figures such as Emperor Maurice – who destroyed στῆλαι πολλαῖ in order to thwart the outbreak of ‘magical practices’ in Constantinople – suggest that the evolution of antique perceptions was far from linear.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> ‘and the sign of the cross stands above them’.

<sup>85</sup> For the other mentions of the cross see ch.16, 34, 52, 57, and 58. For importance of Constantine in *PSC* see Anderson, ‘Classified Knowledge’, 12–13.

<sup>86</sup> Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 59.

<sup>87</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, III.54.

<sup>88</sup> Marcus Diaconus, *Vita Sancti Porphyrii*, A. Hübner (trans.), *Fontes Christiani* (Freiburg, 2013), vol. LIII, ch. 59–61.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 66.

<sup>90</sup> James, ‘Pray Not to Fall into Temptation’, 16.

<sup>91</sup> Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, vol. II, 181, § 54; cf. Mango, ‘Antique Statuary’, 59.

## The Eighth Century

The contraction of the city of Constantinople in the eighth century is germane to the study of *PSC* for the way it stunts cultural and contextual knowledge.<sup>92</sup> One of the most frequent refrains of *PSC* concerns statues and monuments that no longer stand in the city.<sup>93</sup> This profoundly felt absence of statuary contributed yet another factor to Byzantium's already mixed feelings towards Antiquity. Several examples from *PSC* will now illustrate the process by which layers of interpretation regarding statuary had accumulated by the eighth century.

Sometimes the authors of *PSC* exhibit an impressive knowledge of a statue's history. Such is the case of the Herakles in the Hippodrome, which was originally erected in Tarentum. It was first taken as booty to Rome, and then transferred to Constantinople.<sup>94</sup> The authors of *PSC* know that it came from Rome, but are not aware that it was originally in Tarentum.<sup>95</sup> This is likely due to the fame of Herakles, which also apparently allows the Christian authors to justify the fact that offerings were made to it.<sup>96</sup> At other times, the authors demonstrate pointed confusion. The statue of Hekate at the Milion is described as Constantine and his two sons, even though the author is puzzled and confesses it is a ‘ξένον θέαμα’.<sup>97</sup> Occasionally, statues are mistaken for biblical characters, as is probably the case with the statue of Herakles and the Hesperides sisters in the Hippodrome, which the author thinks represent Adam and Eve.<sup>98</sup>

Ch. 61 of *PSC* presents an unusual inversion. According to a certain Herodian, the statue in question is identified as Verina, the wife of Leo the Great, but the writer disagrees with the informant by siding with the more general consensus: ‘But as I have myself heard from many people (παρὰ πλειόνων ἤκουσα), it is instead the statue of Athena from Hellas, and this I believed.’ This episode is strange because it contradicts *PSC*'s typical dependence on trustworthy individual sources, but also important because it indicates that the πλειόνων also held their own strong opinions. On the whole, the authors of *PSC* show very little method by

<sup>92</sup> See C. Mango, *Byzantium, the Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980), 80.

<sup>93</sup> Some statues have been taken from the city (ch.6, 12, and 44), some have been burned (ch.10) or melted down (ch.13, 42), several have been buried (ch.7, 8, 28, 38), one sank in the harbour (ch.5a), and still others have been destroyed (ch.4, 46, 48, and 57). Often, the statues are simply described with past tense language, such as the imperfect ἴστατο, ‘it stood’ (ch.17, 18).

<sup>94</sup> Bassett, *Urban Image*, 152–54.

<sup>95</sup> Ch.37.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> ‘strange/foreign statue’, ch.43; cf. Bassett, *Urban Image*, 239–40.

<sup>98</sup> Ch.5; cf. Bassett, *Urban Image*, 218.

which they determine a statue's true identity, although it seems that interpretations involving older (pagan) identities usually trump those involving biblical or more recent history.

Several repetitions and ambiguities suggest not only that there are multiple views concerning statuary acknowledged in *PSC*, but also that the eighth century was a period when these views were shifting noticeably. Cameron and Herrin claim that the word στοιχεῖον demonstrates a marked disparity between *PSC* and later patriographic works.<sup>99</sup> In these works, στοιχεῖον frequently describes a 'statue which has been bewitched by a philosopher or magician,' whereas this meaning is only likely at one point in *PSC*.<sup>100</sup> Emperor Alexander (912 – 913) believed the boar statue in the Hippodrome had special power as his personal στοιχεῖον.<sup>101</sup> If the magical dimension of a στοιχεῖον begins to surface in *PSC*, it is still far from the intensely personal example of Emperor Alexander. In the eleventh century, Codinos recounts how Michael I Rangabe (811 – 813) had the hand of the τύχη cut off because he genuinely believed it would prevent the factions from revolting.<sup>102</sup> Finally, by the early thirteenth century, Choniates relates an elaborate story about a small male figurine trapped within the hoof of an equestrian statue that had the power to set hostile enemies in attack upon Constantinople.<sup>103</sup> In light of these examples, *PSC* could represent 'a developing tradition' within one vein of Constantinopolitan perceptions of Antiquity.<sup>104</sup> Although it is possible that this vein influenced attitudes of superstition in later Byzantium, it may be just as likely that *PSC*'s fascination with statues influenced the aesthetic statuary in the Bath of Leo the Wise.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

Mango suggested that we consider Byzantine perception of ancient statuary on two levels.<sup>106</sup> It is here proposed that we consider a spectrum of views that cut across class, education, and religion, recognizing that the absorption of antique ideas and myths as their own had

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<sup>99</sup> Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 33.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> I. Bekker, (ed.), *Theophanes Continuatus* (Bonn, 1838), 379, § 4.12–17.

<sup>102</sup> *Patria* II, 101.

<sup>103</sup> Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, J. L. van Dieten (ed.), (Berlin, 1975), 643; cf. *Patria* II, 47.

<sup>104</sup> Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 34.

<sup>105</sup> It should be noted that the Bath of Leo the Wise represents a view of statuary unusually reminiscent of Late Antiquity. See P. Magdalino, 'The Bath of Leo the Wise and the "Macedonian Renaissance" Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial, Ideology', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 42 (1988), 97–118.

<sup>106</sup> Mango, 'Antique Statuary', 59.

potential to affect all members of Byzantine society.<sup>107</sup> This spectrum of views was drastically influenced by the different layers of understanding that had accumulated around ancient statuary. In considering the layers of understanding we find a tangible juxtaposition between those elements of Antiquity that were seen as distinct and those that had completely dissolved into the solution of Byzantine culture.

*PSC* thus reflects the complex perceptions of Antiquity present in eighth-century Constantinople. Although these perceptions can be roughly located in a pattern of growing distance from Constantine's, they were hardly uniform. Such distancing was unquestionably fuelled by both the rise of relic cults in Christianity and the increasing popularity of the Christian Chronicle, which significantly altered the way Byzantium conceptualised the past, present, and future. This study confirms Ševčenko's view that it is best to think of many different 'Byzantiums' existing at any given period in the empire's history.<sup>108</sup> If confusion and discord concerning the statues themselves eventually arose, Constantine's project to fuse the identity of Constantinople with the antique past was perhaps more successful than he could have ever predicted.

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<sup>107</sup> James, 'Pray Not to Fall into Temptation', 14.

<sup>108</sup> Ševčenko, 'The Search for the Past'.



**Fig.1**

(taken from [www.trekearth.com/gallery/Middle\\_East/Turkey/Marmara/Istanbul/Sultanahmet/photo1346464](http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Middle_East/Turkey/Marmara/Istanbul/Sultanahmet/photo1346464))

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